



CRWD board sets '13 proposed levy

Watershed district's managers now only can decrease amount funded by taxes

AUSTIN, Minn. – Thursday, Aug. 16, 2012 – New initiatives aimed at reducing flooding and improving water quality in the Cedar River Watershed District are part of a proposed budget for 2013 approved Wednesday.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) incentives totaling \$35,000 under the proposed '13 budget for the CRWD and a new tree removal program proposed for \$42,950 are in the draft budget for next year.

The Cedar River Watershed District's Board of Managers voted unanimously Wednesday night to set the maximum tax levy in 2013 at \$250,000, which is \$25,000 higher than the final approved amount for the current 2012 budget. CRWD managers now only can decrease that amount when they vote in December on finalizing the district's '13 tax levy.

CRP incentives and tree-removal assistance offered by the CRWD are main reasons for the proposed budget's increased amount from the current budget total.

A voluntary federal program, CRP provides agricultural landowners annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland. With the CRWD's incentives program, funds would be offered to help keep current CRP land in that program when its contract is expiring.

CRWD officials have seen a need for offering incentives to keep land enrolled in CRP because higher crop values are enticing landowners farm that land when their CRP contract expires.

With CRP, millions of acres of American topsoil are protected from erosion by reducing water runoff and sedimentation in an effort to safeguard the nation's natural resources.

CRWD staff also would like funding in 2013 to work closely with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on the district's proposed initiative to offer funding assistance for removing trees from waterways that are causing significant concerns related to streambank erosion negatively affecting water quality, said Justin Hanson, resource specialist for the CRWD. Other water flow issues

arise as well from some fallen trees, especially if the tree spans the entire stream bed of a waterway, Hanson said.

Approved for formation in 2007 by the state of Minnesota, the CRWD covers 278,540 acres that include much of western Mower County and parts of Dodge, Steele and Freeborn counties. Its main goals are to reduce flooding as well as protect and improve water quality in its streams.

This year is the first in which the CRWD has been able to directly fund "earth-moving" projects related to flood reduction and water quality improvement rather than just funding studies related to those area. The CRWD first had to work through a long process for creating a 10-year water management plan as well as creating and approving – as required by state law – rules and a permitting program to accomplish its purposes.

Who: Cedar River Watershed District's Board of Managers.

What: Voted unanimously to set the CRWD's maximum tax levy at \$250,000 for 2013. This amount is \$25,000 more than the finalized budget figure for 2012.

Where: Ruby Rupner Auditorium, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, Austin.

When: Wednesday night, Aug. 15.

Why: The CRWD board had to set a maximum levy for the 2013 budget. That amount now only can be decreased when the board finalizes the levy in December.

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